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C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 002276

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/28/2018

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SUBJECT: NEW THAI FOREIGN MINISTER APPOINTED; NEW COURT
CASE LIKELY TO PROMPT FURTHER CABINET RESIGNATIONS

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission James F. Entwistle, reason: 1.4
(b) and (d).

11. (C) On July 27, King Bhumibol formally appointed Tej Bunnag, former Ambassador to the United States, as Thailand's new Foreign Minister. Prime Minister Samak Sundaravej's selection of Tej, a career diplomat, was generally welcomed as a non-controversial move in a political environment that remains highly polarized. On July 28, Tej traveled to Siem Reap, Cambodia, to engage in bilateral talks with his Cambodian counterpart on the dispute over the disposition of the Preah Vihear temple. As of late afternoon July 28, we have not received information from our Thai contacts on the developments in those talks, which were continuing with no set time to conclude.

12. (C) Separately, the Supreme Court's Criminal Division for Political Office Holders on July 28 accepted for consideration a case that the Asset Examination Committee had compiled against Thaksin Shinawatra and former members of one of his cabinets. The allegation in this case is that Thaksin and his cabinet engaged in dereliction of duty, embezzlement, and other infractions when they establishing a new government lottery program in 2003. Three current cabinet members are charged in this matter: Deputy Prime Minister/Finance Minister Surapong Suebwonglee (also Secretary General of the People's Power Party), Labor Minister Uraiwan Thienthong (wife of Pracharaj Party Leader Sanoh Thienthong), and Deputy Transportation Minister Anurak Jureemart (Deputy Leader of the Chart Thai Party). There is a widespread perception that constitutional provisions (specifically, in Article 275, incorporating by reference provisions of Article 272) require government officials charged in cases such as this one to suspend the performance of their duties, and it appears likely that Prime Minister Samak will replace Surapong, Uraiwan, and Anurak in his upcoming reshuffle.

BIO OF NEW FOREIGN MINISTER

13. (U) Tej Bunnag, born on November 25, 1943, joined the MFA in 1969. He served one overseas tour, in Jakarta (1976-1979), before receiving Ambassadorial rank in 1983, when he became Ambassador Attached to the Foreign Ministry. In 1986, he was assigned as Ambassador to the People's Republic of China, also accredited to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. In 1990, he became Thailand's Permanent

Representative to the United Nations office in Geneva. From 1996 until 2000, he served as Thailand's Ambassador to France and Permanent Representative to UNESCO. He served as Ambassador to the United States from 2000 until 2001. From 2001 until 2004, he was Permanent Secretary at the MFA. In 2004, he became an Advisor in the Office of His Majesty the King's Principal Private Secretary. Tej receive Bachelor's and Master's degrees from Cambridge University, and he received his Doctorate from Oxford. He is married to Mrs. Phensri Bunnag. He holds more than a dozen positions in foundations and academic institutions.

JOHN